

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
VFW Post 1433, 7618 N. 63rd Ave, Glendale AZ 85301
Saturday, August 16, 2008

A P P R O V E D M I N U T E S

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman Yamanouchi.

Present

Advisory Commissioners

Services

Kenneth Yamanouchi, Chairman
Linda Fulkerson, Vice Chairwoman
Gary Fredricks
Counselor
Phillip Quochcytewa
Bill Lunsford
Larry McKim
Terrie Gent
George Cushing

Arizona Department of Veterans'

Joey Strickland, Director
Lee Borgen, Vets' Benefit Counselor
Martha Alderman, Vets' Benefits

Absent

Tom Heaney (absent)
Glendale

VA Regional

Administrative
Medical Center Phoenix

Medical Center

Guests

Manny Martinez, Vice Mayor of

Bob Barrett, Mayor of Peoria
Michael Wilson, Vet Service Rep,

Office Phoenix
Rick Bard, Chief Medical
Services, VA

Thaxton Herndon, Eligibility, VA

Phoenix

Opening: Chairman Yamanouchi opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. and thanked Commander Patrick Carter for hosting the meeting. He gave a brief overview of the Advisory Commission and invited the Commissioners to introduce themselves with a brief bio.

Chairman Yamanouchi recognized the distinguished guests.

Minutes:

- The minutes of June 12, 2008 were unanimously approved subject to submitted corrections. (Moved by Commissioner Fredricks and seconded by Vice Chairwoman Fulkerson)
- The minutes of July 10, 2008 were unanimously approved as distributed.

(Moved by Commissioner Cushing and seconded by Commissioner McKim.)

Chairman Yamanouchi introduced Director Joey Strickland who gave a brief bio of his experience. He expressed enthusiasm for his new position as Director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS). He emphasized that he will work hard for Arizona veterans and solicited the help of all veterans and veterans' organizations to join him and the Advisory Commission to enhance services and entitlements for our veterans' community.

Chairman Yamanouchi announced that the planned State Veteran Home in Tucson may be included in the VA's 2009 budget. That means that the State needs to recommit our 10 million dollar share. Chairman Yamanouchi also pointed out that people should not believe everything they read in the papers; what is printed is not always the whole truth. The State Veteran Home in Phoenix is open for business and currently has 50 empty beds.

Chairman Yamanouchi advised that 5 years ago the Commission divided the State into 4 regions. The Commission visits a different region each quarter and conducts a town hall style meeting to listen to the interests and concerns of that region's veteran community. He then turned the meeting over to Commissioners Fredricks and Cushing.

Commissioner Fredricks encouraged people to use the question/comment cards on the tables so that we can keep good records, in compliance with open meeting rules, and so that we can get back to an individual if necessary.

Commissioner Cushing emphasized the importance of our Arizona Veterans' Registry and encouraged everyone to take some forms, make copies and encourage vets to complete them and send them in.

Comments and Questions from the floor:

Comment: A disabled vet asked if anyone had heard of the John C. Butler Destroyer Escort Sailors' Assoc. He gave a brief description of the organization's mission and goals. He advised that they shipped 106 care packages to our troops in Afghanistan so far this year and invited anyone interested in becoming involved to contact him, Tom Alexander at 602 973 5380.

Commissioner Fredricks advised that the Unified Arizona Veterans is a consortium of 35 veteran organizations that meet the first Saturday of every month, except August, at the State Veteran Home from 10:00 a.m. to noon.

Question: 100% vet asked what happens when he passes on.

Answer: Martha Alderman gave a brief overview of survivor benefits for 100% service connected veterans and explained how advocates can help.

Chairman Cushing advised that we have a full time veterans' benefits counselor at the Northwest Clinic.

Comment: A lady advised that many Department of Motor Vehicle offices and some Department of Economic Security offices are not knowledgeable about State benefits for survivors of 100% service connected veterans. Property tax exemption on one vehicle

continues after the veteran dies, but some are finding it extremely difficult to get. Perhaps the Commission could talk to those in authority to get the word out to local offices.

Answer: Martha Alderman advised that both the VA and ADVS issue 100% letters to verify a survivor's status. The ADVS letter verifies entitlement to the vehicle property tax exemption and identifies the Arizona Revised Statute that applies.

Question: Why don't all veterans get a free hunting and fishing license?

Answer: A veteran in the audience advised that Game and Fish does not get state funding. Their only source of funding comes from licenses.

Question: Why not use the area around Luke Air Force Base (AFB) for a National Cemetery instead of agriculture.

Answer:

- Commissioner Fredricks advised that Cave Creek VA National Cemetery is only half full and the State Cemetery at Sierra Vista just opened. The next State cemetery will be a Camp Navajo near Flagstaff.
- Commissioner McKim noted that VA rules require a minimum seventy-five mile radius between veteran cemeteries. The land around Luke AFB is too close to Cave Creek. The next cemetery after Flagstaff will be somewhere around Casa Grande, to be well outside the 75 mile zone.
- Chairman Yamanouchi advised that there is a proactive group called Fighter Country Partnership. It is made up of various entities interested in protecting and preserving Luke AFB. Anyone interested is encouraged to join them and get involved.

Comment: A gentleman noted that there have been fewer complaints about Luke since 9/11.

Question: Why is ADVS so quiet? The only media coverage is negative. Why doesn't ADVS actively engage in public relations efforts?

Answer: Director Strickland advised that the agency has a Public Relations Officer who will be very proactive for the Agency and veteran's issues. The Agency needs to put the negative behind it and move forward. To accomplish this we need everyone's help. We need people to speak out and write articles when they see negative things that are unwarranted.

Question: How does the Commission tie into the deduction on the state tax form? Where does the money go?

Answer: Director Strickland advised that the pre-tax deduction on the State Income Tax form goes directly into the Arizona Veteran Donation Fund which is used for the benefit of the Arizona veteran's community.

Commissioner Cushing noted that Arizona's Military Family Relief Fund is also a very worthy cause and is authorized as a pre-tax deduction.

Question: Is there a program to help people facing foreclosure?

Answer: Martha Alderman advised that the VA Home Loan office can help veterans if they have a VA home loan. If the veteran does not have a VA loan the Home Loan office can provide some contact phone numbers for assistance.

Comment: A gentlemen advised that he is in the mortgage industry and the foreclosure rate on VA home loans has not increased since 9/11. The problem is in the private sector.

Question: What does the Commission want to accomplish in the next year and next five years?

Answer:

- Chairman Yamanouchi advised:
 - The Commission is working on updating their strategic plan and developing steps to operationalize the strategic plan.
 - They will no longer differentiate Federal from State issues and will follow-up on every issue raised by the veteran. They will track actions until completion.
 - They will collect and maintain data on issues raised and advise the appropriate agencies as they become statistically significant.
 - The Commissioners are committed to serving the veteran and committed to making incremental improvements.
 - He reported on the Troops to Teachers and Hardhats programs.
 - He reported on the Commission being involved in stopping the Support the Troops license plates whose revenues would go directly to a for-profit company in Florida.
 - He credited a former Commissioner who was instrumental in securing legislation to provide free tuition at our state universities for children of military personnel killed in action.
 - The Globe VA Clinic began with the Mayor of Globe attending an Advisory Commission town hall meeting and presenting the needs of the Globe veteran community.
- Commissioner Fredricks emphasized the need for effective two-way communications at all levels. He noted that the most immediate issue is next year's budget. When the budget is stable other initiatives will be addressed.

Question: When will the VA Help page be completed?

Answer: Rick Bard advised the VA's Help page is a work in progress and that it will always have some limitations based on the situation of the individual patient entering the website.

Question: Why isn't there uniformity between educational institutions in the credit they allow for military learning? Some colleges allow credits, others do not.

Answer: (no definitive suggestions offered)

Question: How do we reach (find and reach out to) WW-II veterans who do not know about veterans' benefits.

Answer: Vice Chairwoman Fulkerson suggested that veterans' organizations need to set up information tables at local businesses like Wal-Mart, Office Max, K-Mart, VA clinics, Safeway etc. and have handouts not only for their organization but also for the VA.

Comment: Allowing info tables seems to be an individual business preference. Some allow them and some don't. Perhaps ADVS could contact the corporate headquarters of some of the larger businesses and solicit their cooperation in getting access to their down-line facilities.

Comment: Roughly 80% of the male population is veteran and only 20% belong to organizations. The organizations have improved and are not the way they were twenty years ago. They have all kinds of resources available and welcome all eligible veterans to become involved.

Comment: A lady who has been active in the local veteran community for many decades commented that she has seen great improvement from the organization elitism of the past to now where veterans, veterans' organizations and advocates are working together as veterans for the benefit of veterans.

Comment: Commander Pat Carter, VFW Post 1433, observed that the State Vet Home is getting a bad rap. The Home is a good, safe place that takes good care of the veterans. He visits the Home with other post members on a monthly basis; taking stuff to the Home and frequently brings residents back to the post for an outing. He likes what he sees at the Home.

Answer:

- Director Strickland emphasized that there will always be individual incidents. What is important is to identify them, take corrective action and develop systems to reduce future occurrences. The Home is a good, safe place and we need more residents. We need referrals.

Comment: Rick Bard announced that the Globe/Miami clinic is being expanded and that a new clinic is scheduled to open in the Thunderbird area by the end of this year. VAMC Phoenix is willing and able to think and function "outside-the-box." Veterans need to communicate their needs and concerns.

Commissioner Fredricks thanked everyone for attending and thanked the VFW for their hospitality.

Chairman Yamanouchi also expressed appreciation for the audience's attendance/participation and for the excellent support from the Post.

Adjournment: Commissioner McKim moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Cushing. Motion approved at 12:02 p.m. The next regular meeting will be held at 10 a.m. on September 11, 2008 at the State Veteran Home, 4141 N. 3rd Street, Phoenix AZ 85012.